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Washington Report
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REAGAN'S TOUGH GUYS

Over the past few weeks, I have been paying very close attention to Ronald Reagan's announcements of Cabinet posts. I served in the California State Assembly when Reagan was Governor. I vividly recall his heavy reliance on Cabinet members and their staffs. Both as Governor and in very recent discussions of his concept of the presidency, Mr. Reagan has expressed his preference for leadership modeled after the "Board of Directors" and "Chairman of the Board" pattern used in the business world. This preference makes the Reagan Cabinet members more powerful, more autonomous, more important than members of the Cabinet have been since the Eisenhower years.

I was struck by the repeated use of the adjective "tough" in news descriptions of the Reagan men (and one woman). Wherever I turned, the macho symbol appeared. Almost all of Reagan's choices had proved their "toughness", either as businessmen or lawyers for businessmen.

William French Smith, an attorney who specializes in fighting on the business side of disputes between business and workers or labor was characterized as especially "tough -- but fair". Almost all the cabinet nominees are depicted as aggressive, competitive men who never shy away from a fight.

I see nothing wrong with being tough. Certainly we do not want our high level officials to be weak-willed cowards unable to stand up for what they believe. Still, the "tough guys" image disturbs me.

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Nowhere in the columns of print about the Reagan Cabinet choices is even a passing mention made of such traits as compassion, kindness or concern for people. I fear the Administration and the press have, perhaps unconsciously, incorporated the dangerous notion that "tough" is always good.

In my lifetime there has probably never been a tougher Cabinet officer than Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He was touted as hardheaded and realistic. He brought the famous computer-oriented whiz-kids from the business world to the Pentagon. It took years for us to extricate ourselves from the delusions of the Pentagon "realists".

I wonder against whom the Reagan Cabinet members have been so tough in their business careers and in the years many of them spent as Nixon or Ford appointees. There is no trick to being tough when up against weak, small and dispersed "opponents". It is just as important to pick enemies deserving of your enmity as it is to pursue the battle with courage.

As a liberal Democratic Congressman who opposed President Reagan, I anticipate difficult days ahead. Though I pray for President Reagan's success, I also fear the consequences of his possible failure. As I look at his "Board of Directors", I fear progressive members of Congress will have to be on constant guard lest they prove too tough, too often, against defenseless adversaries.

Above all, I hope that the President and his Cabinet of seasoned warriors will know when the interest of the American people and our responsibilities as the world's most powerful nation require restraint, a lust for peace and an ability to give top priority not to the strong but to the weak, the sick, the poor and the powerless.

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